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Behar et al.

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(54) **ROBOT AND ROBOT SYSTEM**

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G05B 11/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **700/258**; 414/680

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 700/258, 700/254, 245, 257, 262, 248, 249; 414/680, 414/744.5; 901/15, 21, 28, 31, 46, 47; 318/568.12, 318/568.2, 568.21-568.25, 574

See application file for complete search history.

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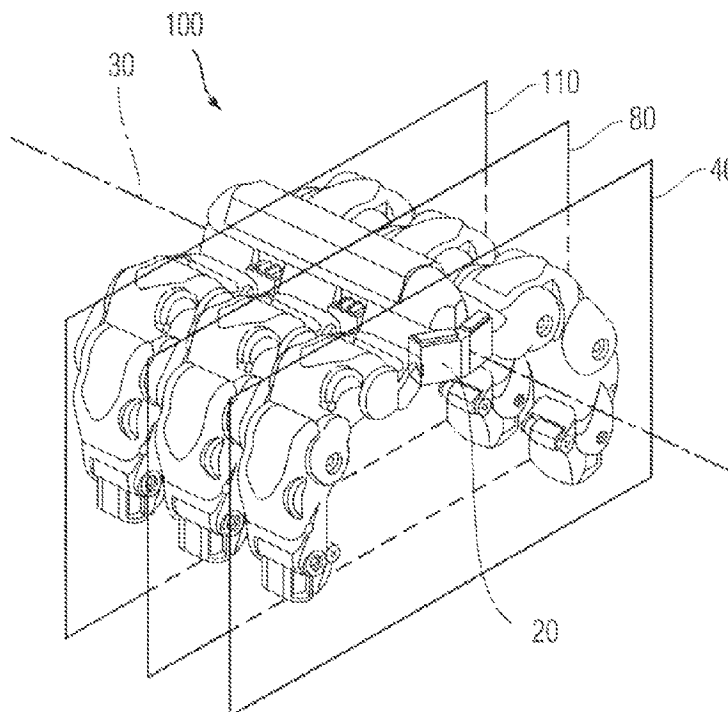
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A robot and robot system that are capable of functioning in a zero-gravity environment are provided. The robot can include a body having a longitudinal axis and having a control unit and a power source. The robot can include a first leg pair including a first leg and a second leg. Each leg of the first leg pair can be pivotally attached to the body and constrained to pivot in a first leg pair plane that is substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the body.

20 Claims, 16 Drawing Sheets



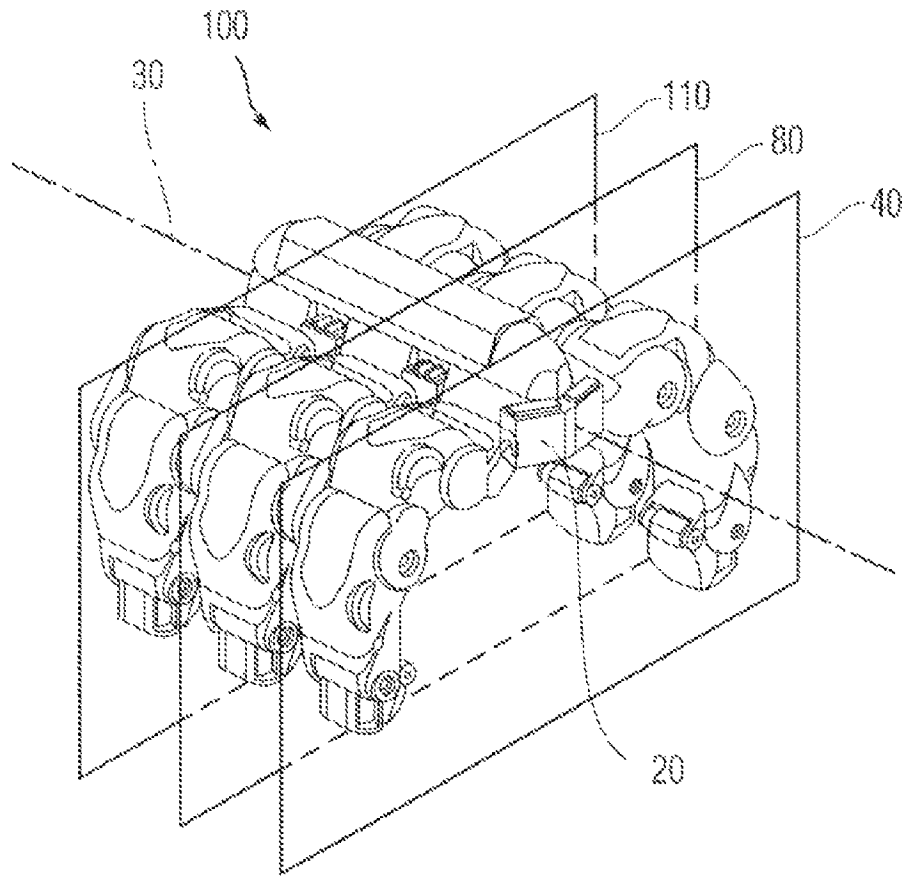


Fig. 1

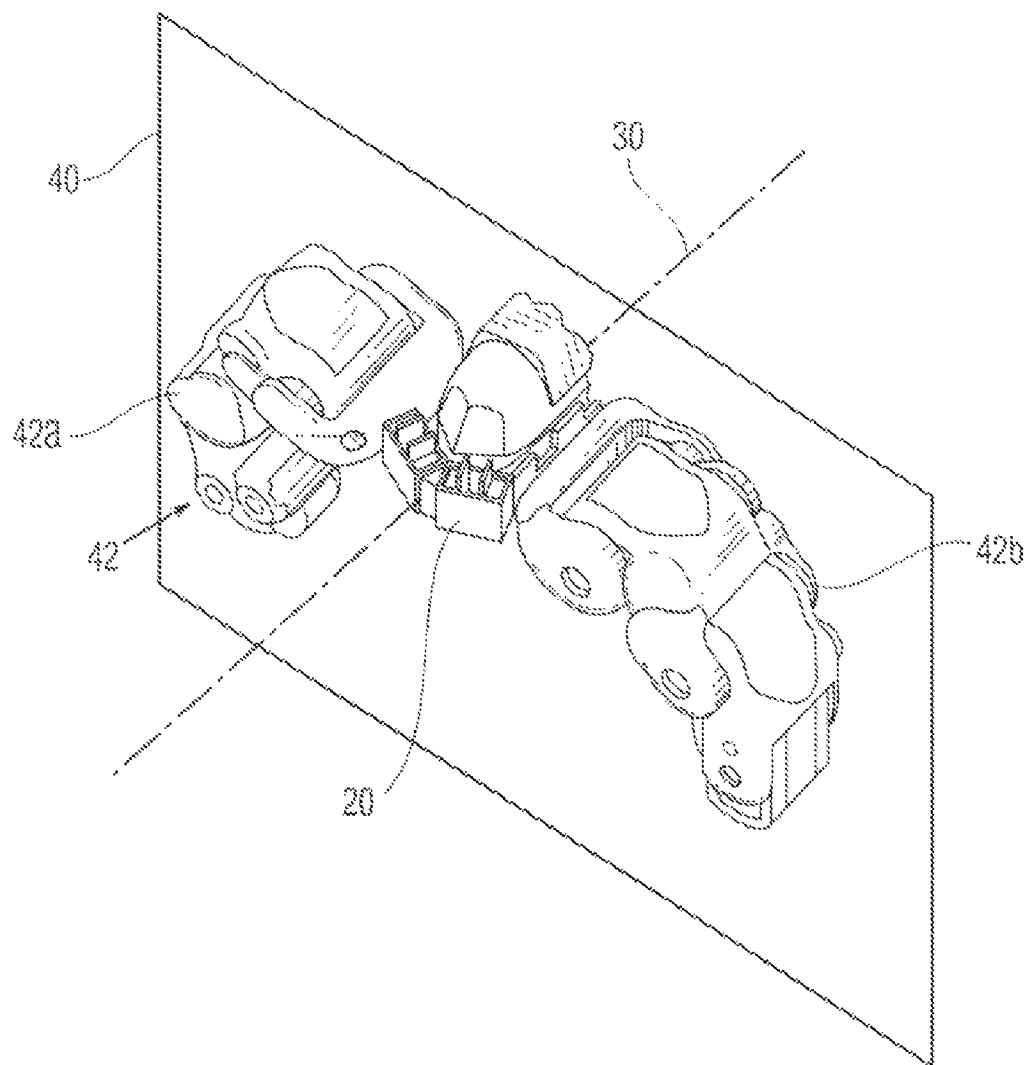


Fig. 2

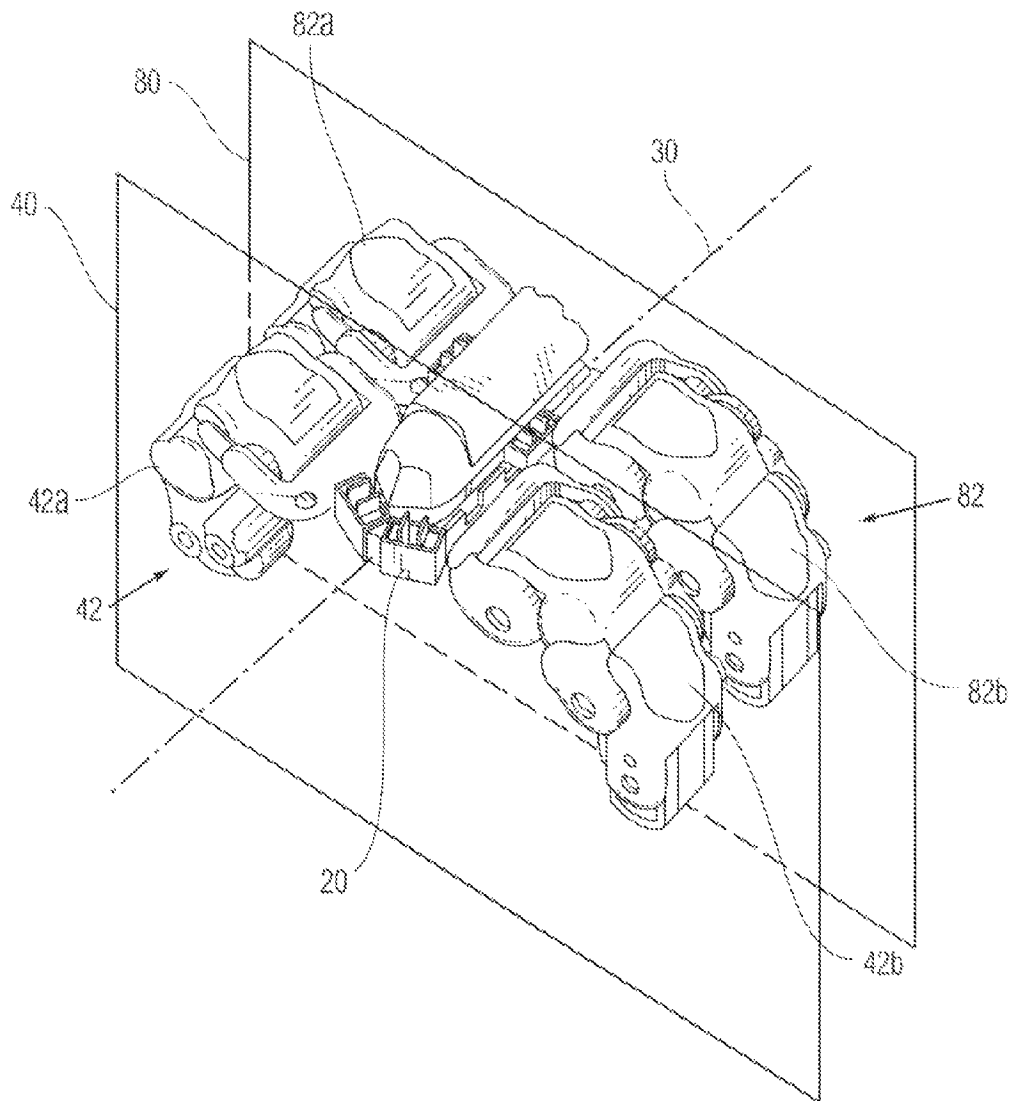


Fig. 3

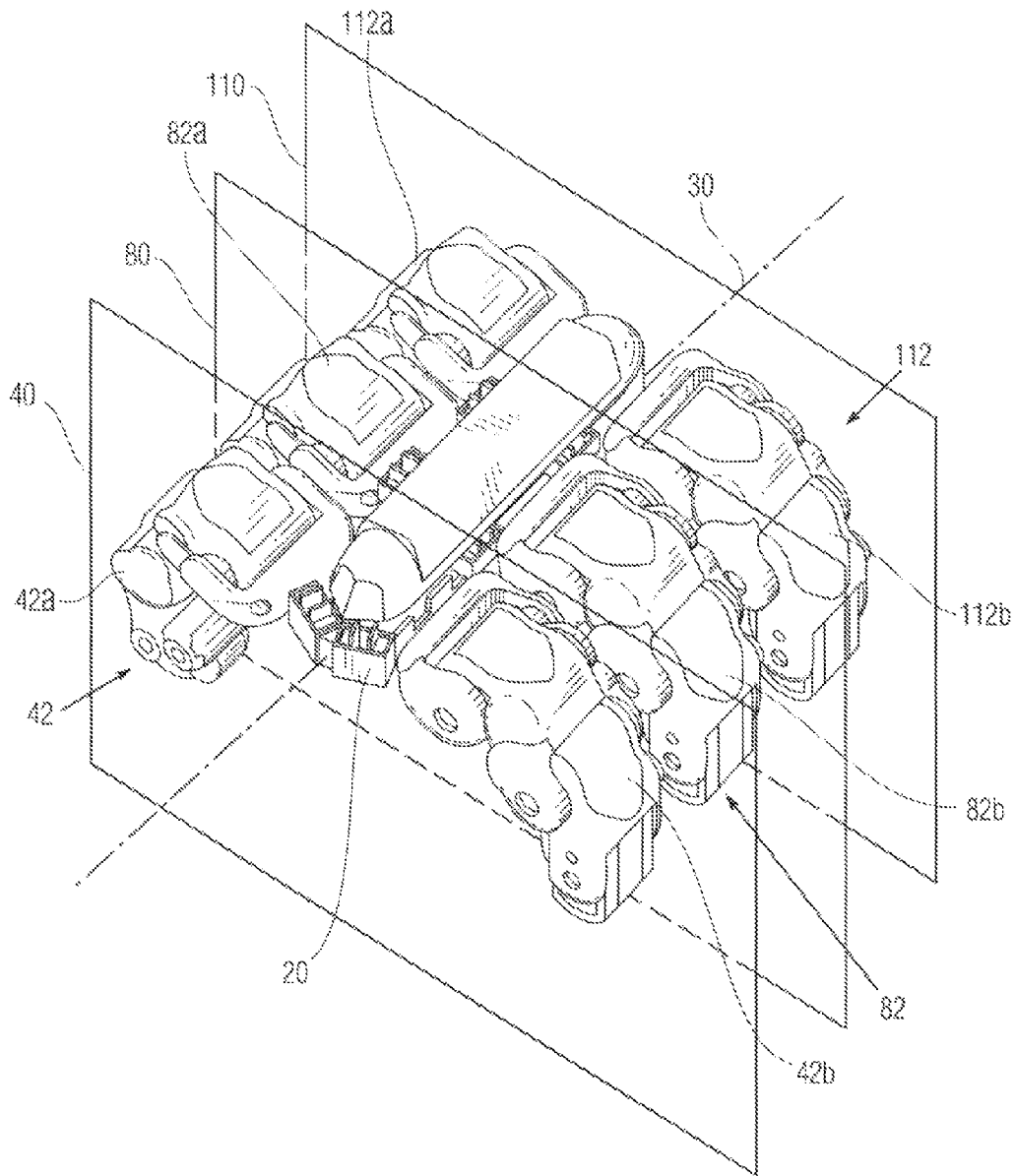


Fig. 4

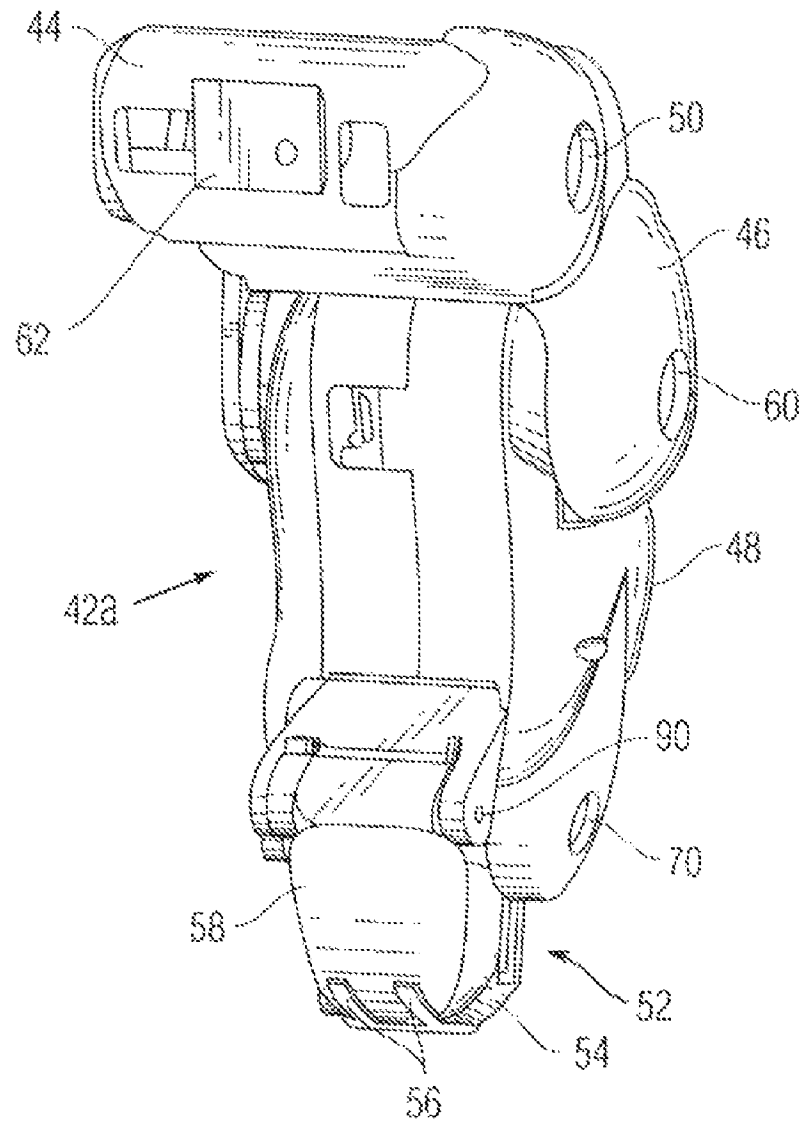


Fig. 5

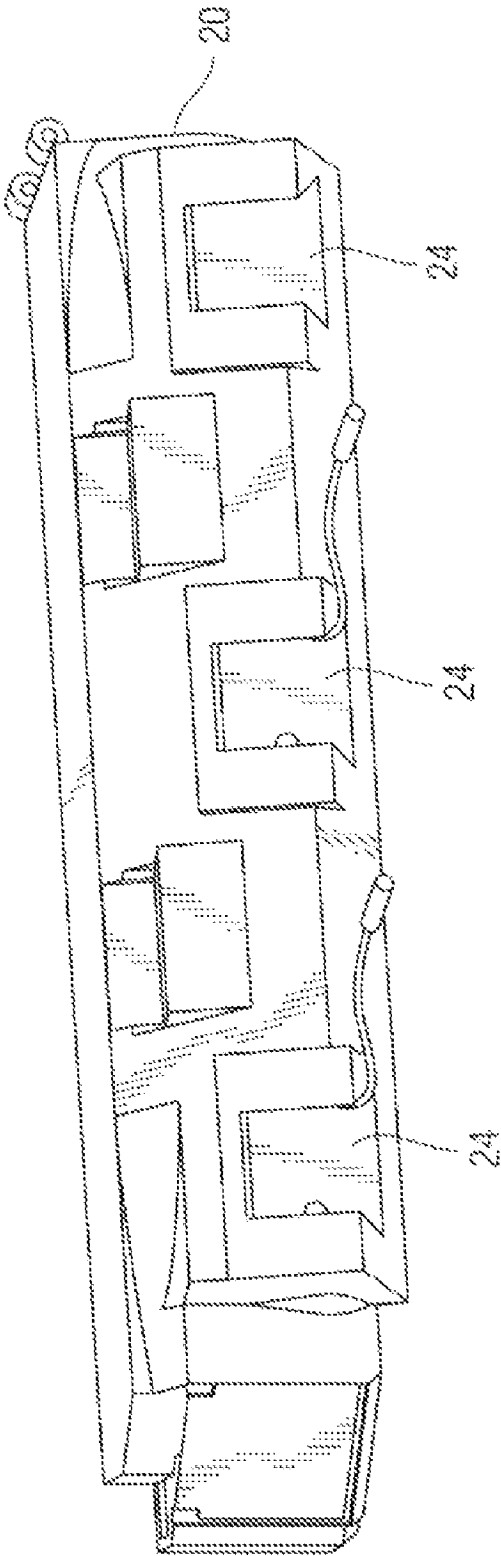


Fig. 6

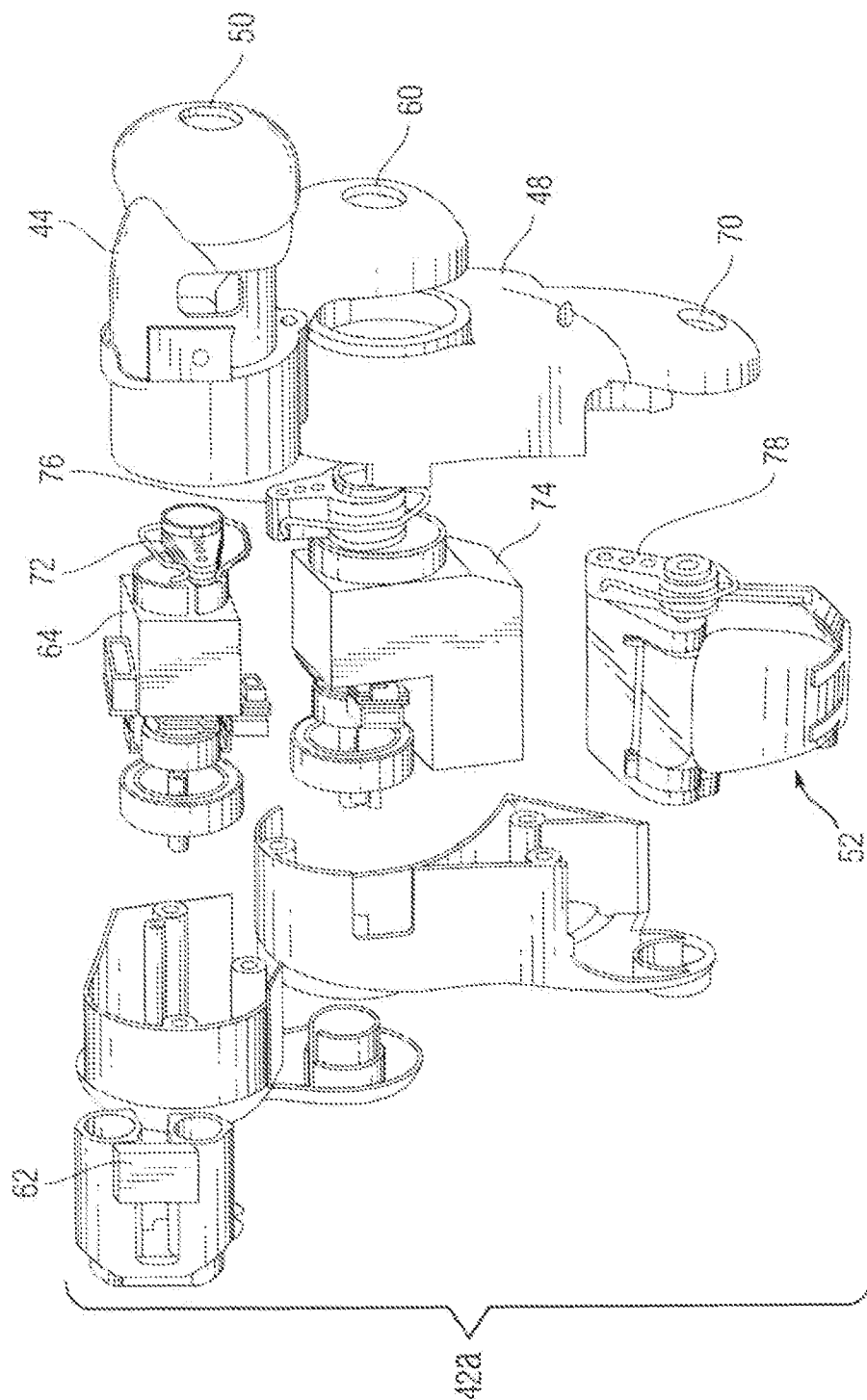


Fig. 7

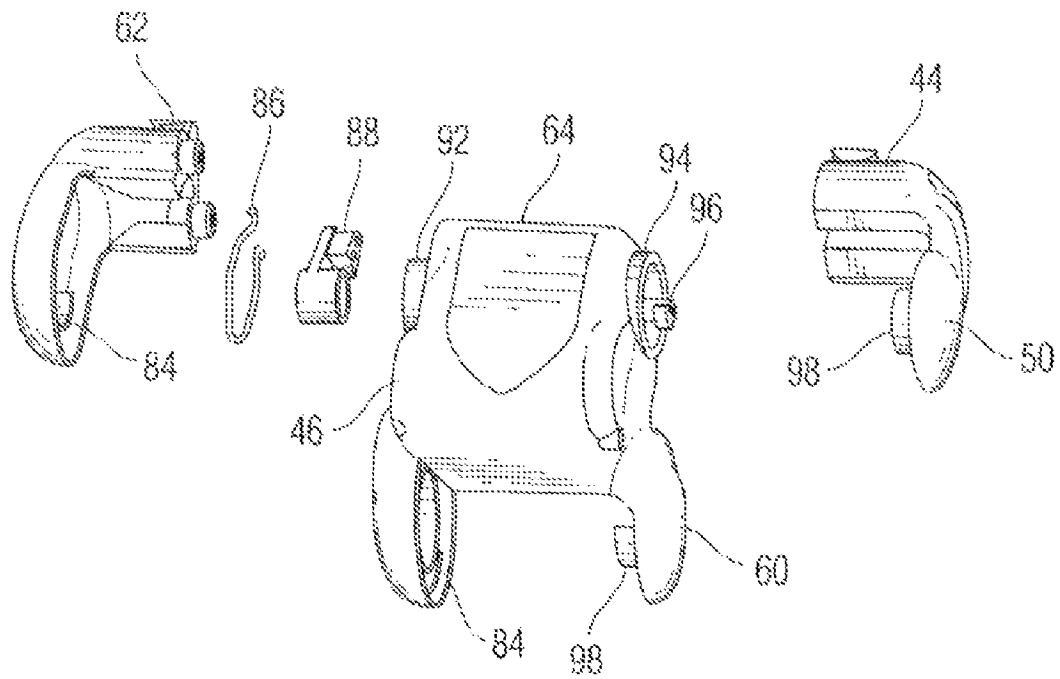


Fig. 8

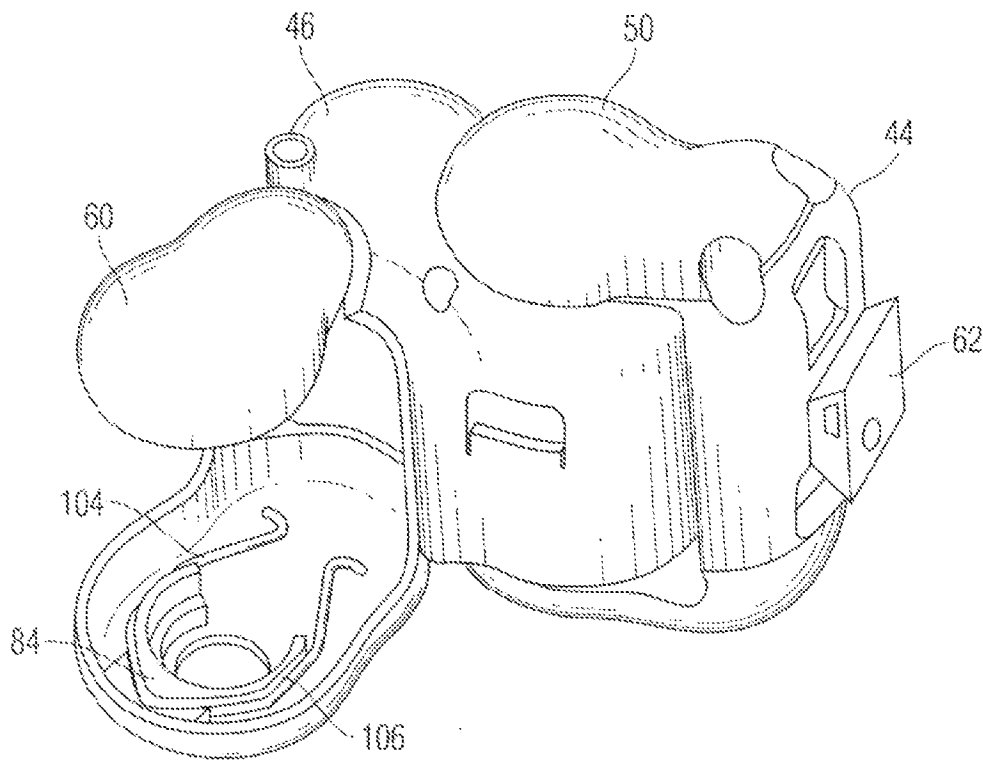


Fig. 9

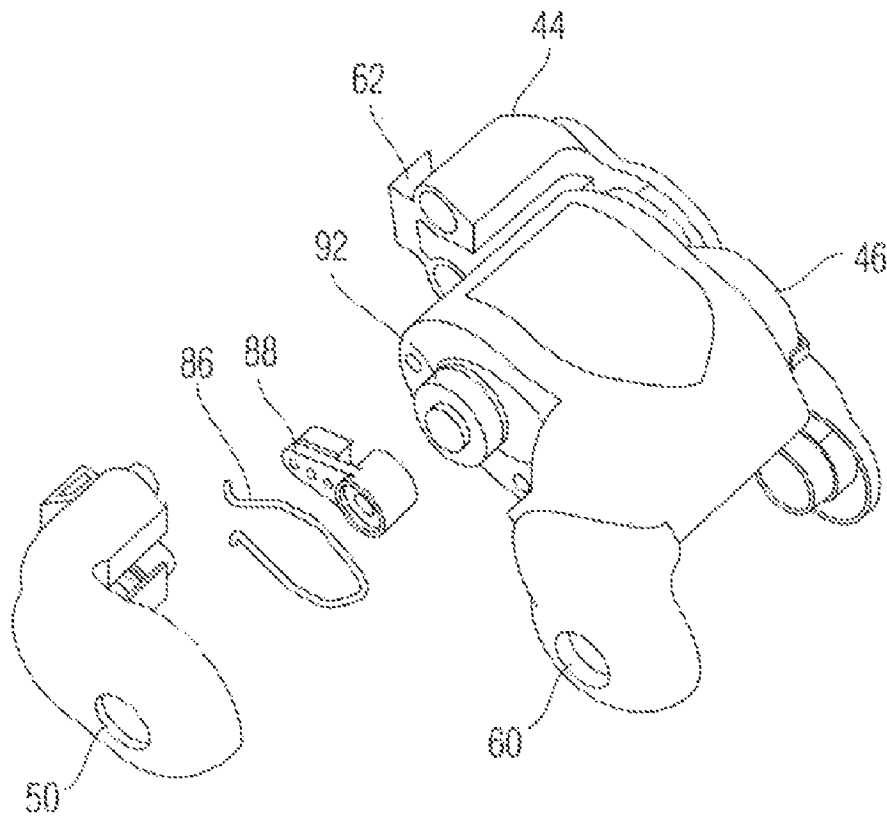


Fig. 10

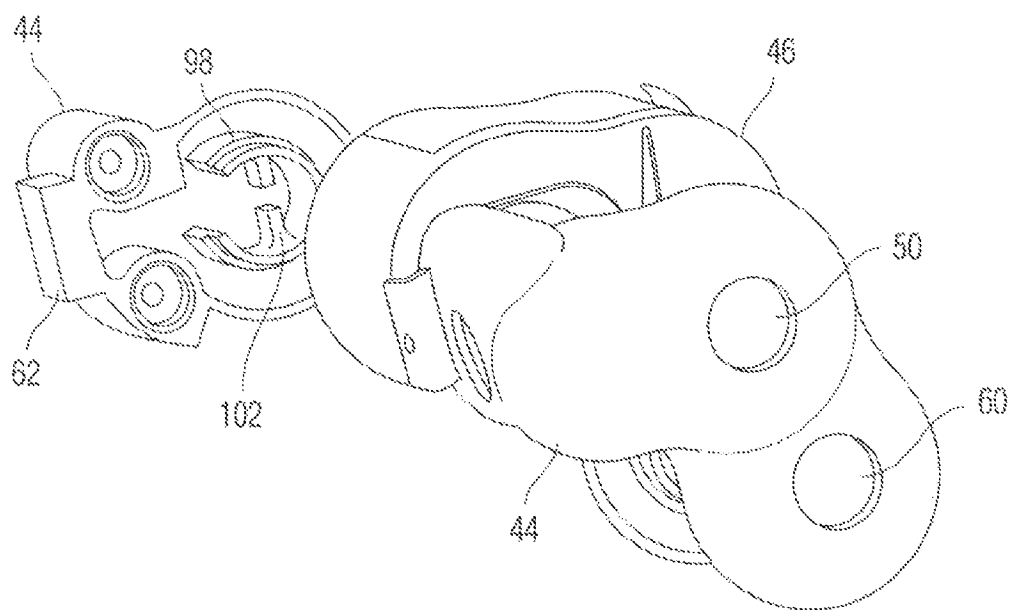


Fig. 11

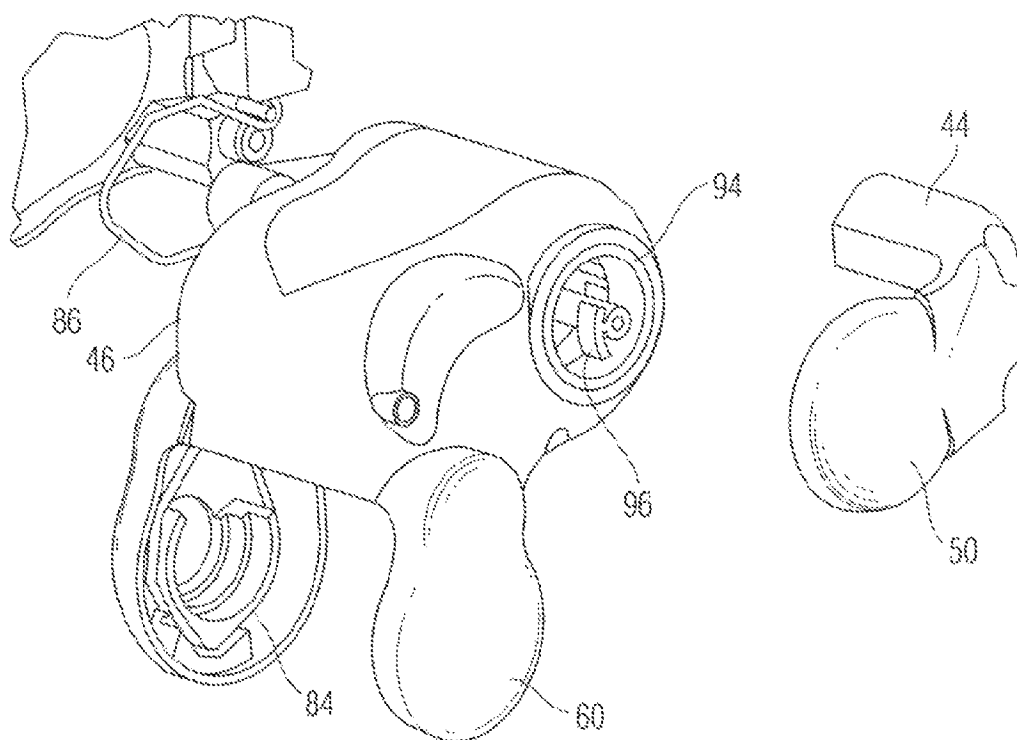


Fig. 12

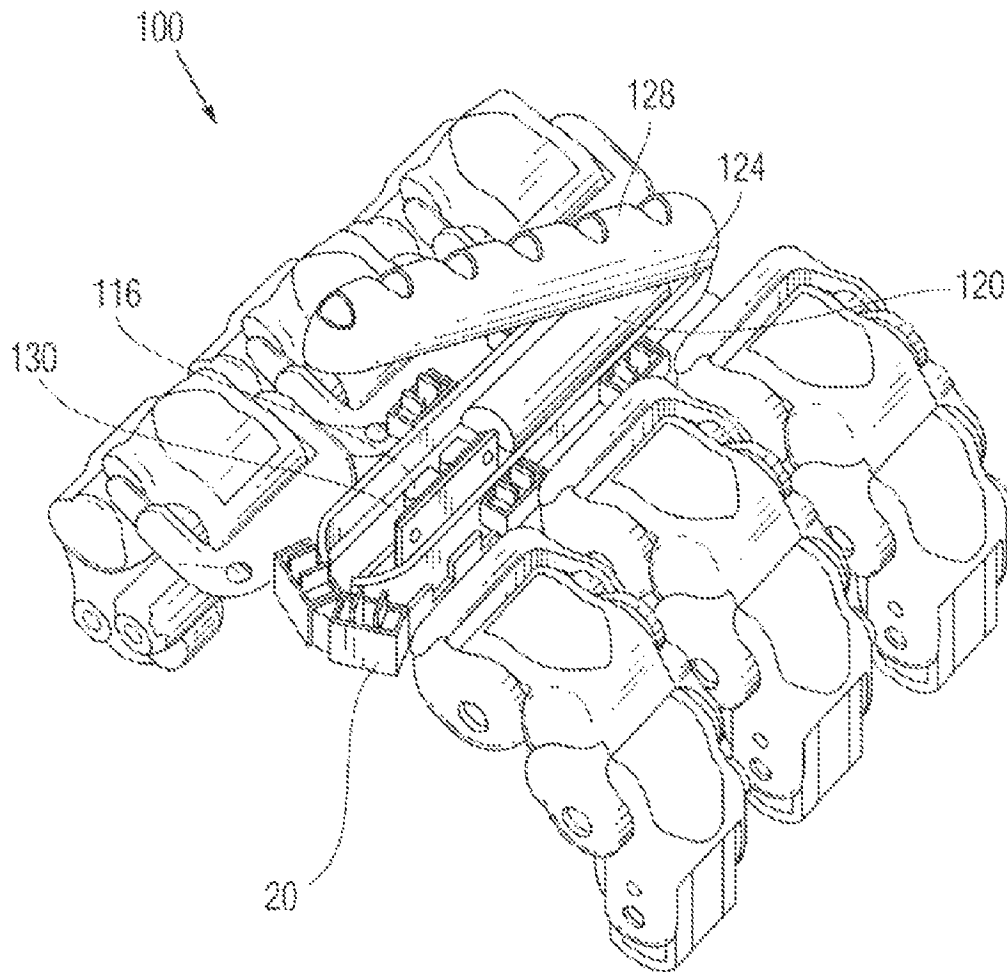


Fig. 13

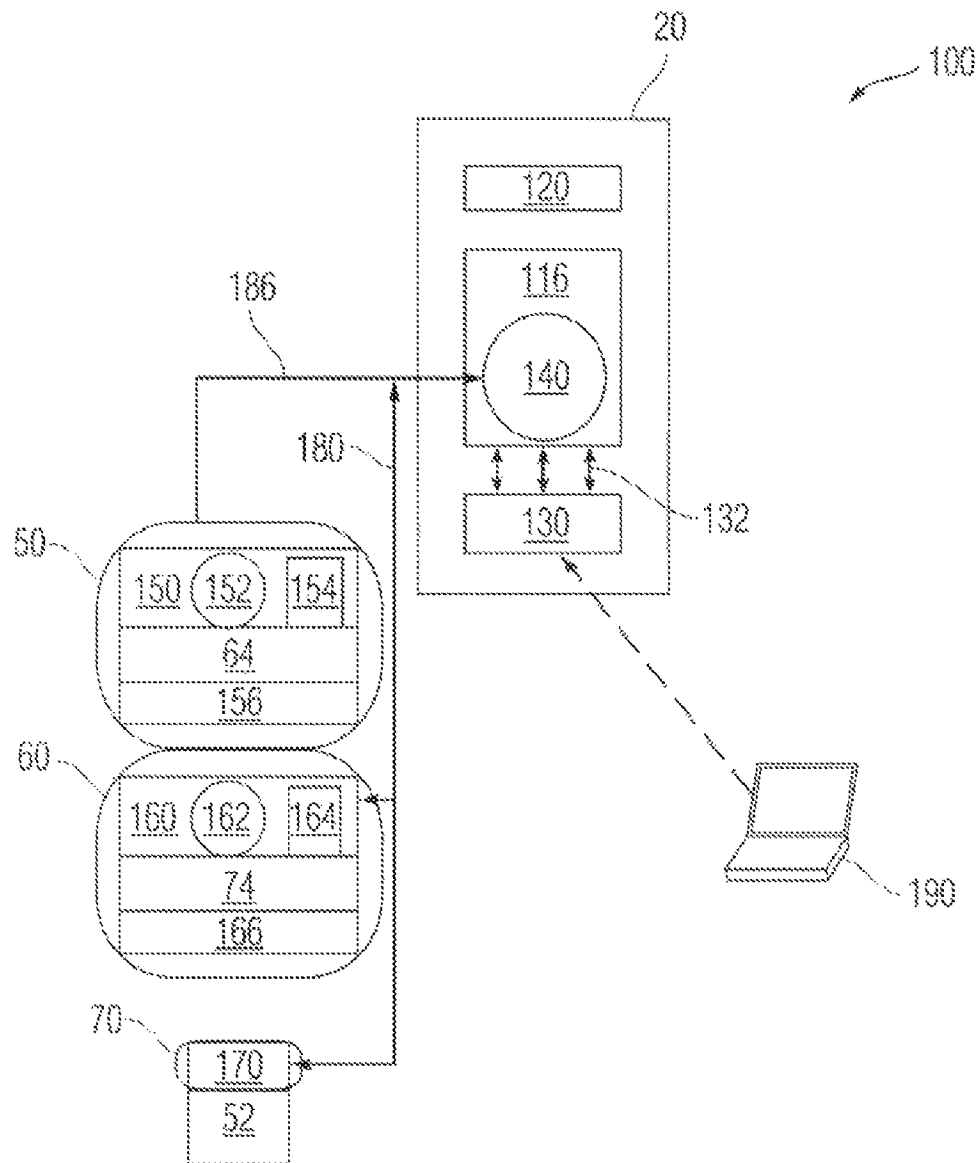


Fig. 14

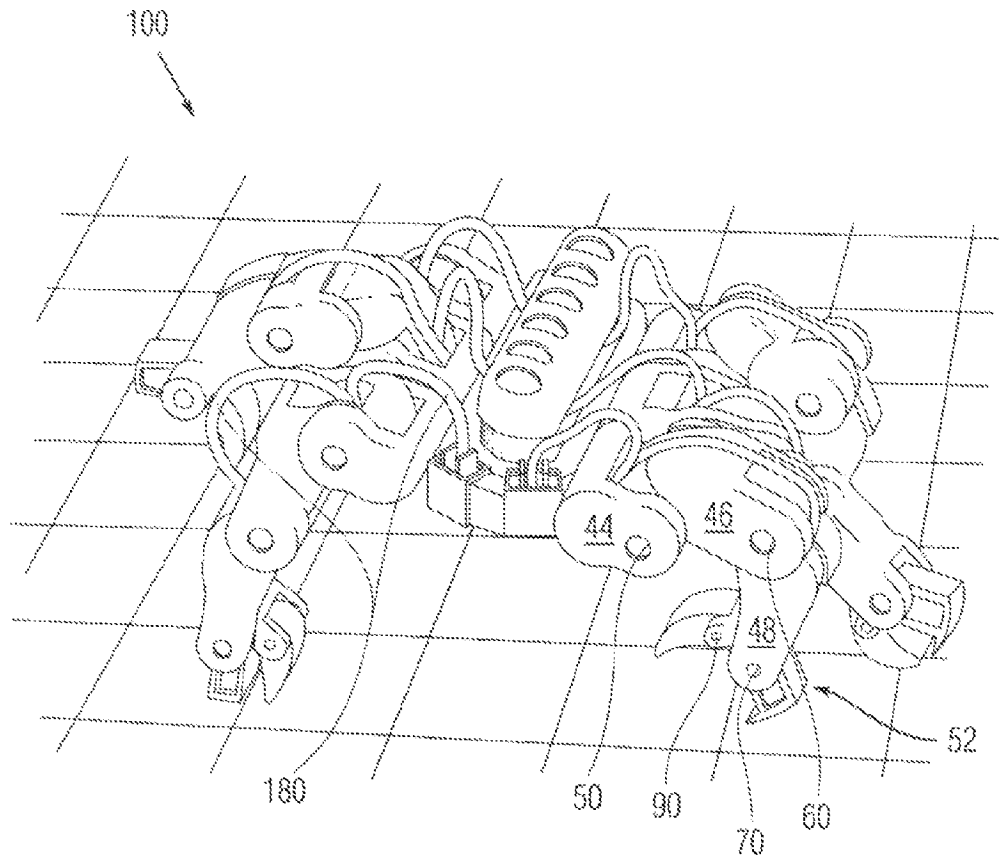


Fig. 15

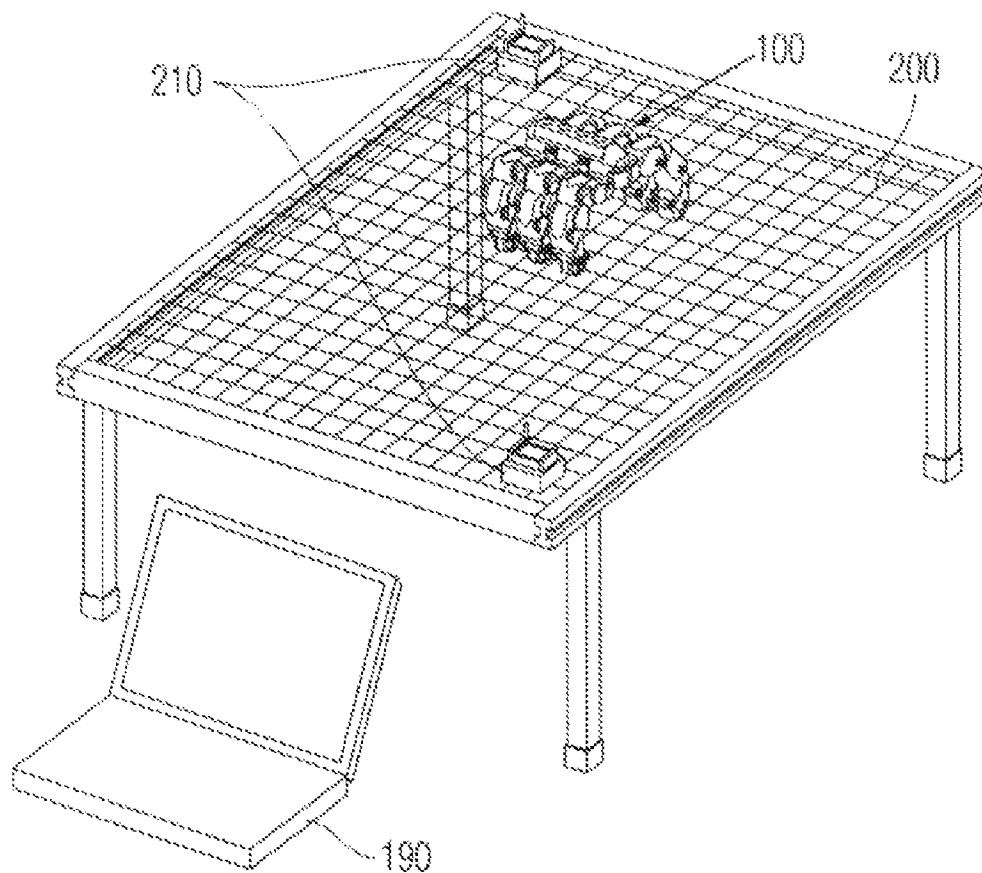


Fig. 16

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ROBOT AND ROBOT SYSTEM**STATEMENT AS TO FEDERALLY-SPONSORED
RESEARCH**

The invention described herein was made in the performance of work under a NASA contract, and is subject to the provisions of Public Law 96-517 (U.S.C. 202), in which the Contractor has not elected to retain title.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present teachings relate to a robot that is capable of efficiently moving in zero-gravity conditions. In particular, the present teachings relate to a robot that can operate in an extra-terrestrial environment and can be controlled from a host computer located at a remote location.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Many presently known robots include complex linkages having many joints, motors, and encoders. The complexity of these known robots makes them bulky, heavy, slow, expensive, and unreliable.

A few critical factors that are considered when designing a robot are compactness, complexity, cost, maneuverability, reliability, and speed.

Accordingly, there continues to exist a need for a robot that is compact, lightweight, inexpensive to manufacture, and capable of efficiently performing various requested tasks. There also exists a need for a robot that is capable of performing tasks in a zero-gravity environment that are communicated to the robot from a remote host computer.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present teachings disclose such a robot that is capable of functioning in a zero-gravity environment, as well as a robot system.

According to the present teachings, the robot includes a body having a longitudinal axis and including a power source and a control unit. The robot also includes a first leg pair including a first leg and a second leg. Each leg of the first leg pair is pivotally attached to the body and is constrained to pivot in a first leg pair plane that is substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the body.

The present teachings also describe a robot having a body including a power source and a control unit. The robot also includes at least one leg pivotally attached to the body. The leg includes a first pivot joint that includes a first servo motor, a first controller module, and a first spring-loaded compliance mechanism. The control unit is arranged to communicate with the first controller module to control pivotal movement of the leg.

The present teachings further describe a robot system including a body having a communication system capable of receiving high level commands from a host computer, a control unit, and a power source. The robot system also includes at least one leg pivotally attached to the body. Each leg includes a first pivot joint including a first controller module and a first servo motor, a second pivot joint including a second controller module and a second servo motor, and a foot assembly. Further, each of the first and second controller modules is capable of directly communicating with the control unit.

Additional features and advantages of various embodiments will be set forth, in part, in the description that follows,

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and will, in part, be apparent from the description, or may be learned by the practice of various embodiments. The objectives and other advantages of various embodiments will be realized and attained by means of the elements and combinations particularly pointed out in the description herein.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an embodiment of the robot of the present teachings;

FIG. 2 is a perspective cut-away view of the robot showing a first leg pair according to various embodiments;

FIG. 3 is a perspective cut-away view of the robot showing a first and second leg pair according to various embodiments;

FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the robot showing a first, second, and third leg pair according to various embodiments;

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a back-side of a first leg of the first leg pair according to various embodiments;

FIG. 6 is a perspective side view of the body of the robot according to various embodiments;

FIG. 7 is an exploded view of the leg of FIG. 5;

FIG. 8 is an exploded view of a portion of the front side of the leg of FIG. 5;

FIG. 9 is a perspective view of the portion of the leg of FIG. 8 showing a spring mount socket according to various embodiments;

FIG. 10 is an exploded, perspective view of the portion of the leg of FIG. 8 showing a rocker arm according to various embodiments;

FIG. 11 is an exploded, perspective view of the portion of the leg of FIG. 8 showing a keyed slot according to various embodiments;

FIG. 12 is an exploded, perspective view of the portion of the leg of FIG. 8 showing a potentiometer arm and support bearing according to various embodiments;

FIG. 13 is a perspective view of the robot showing an interior of the body according to various embodiments;

FIG. 14 is a schematic of the components of the body and a leg of the robot according to various embodiments;

FIG. 15 is a perspective view of the robot during operation on a wire grid according to various embodiments; and

FIG. 16 shows an experimental setup for the robot used during a test flight to simulate a zero-gravity environment.

It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory only, and are intended to provide an explanation of various embodiments of the present teachings.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED
EMBODIMENTS**

The present teachings are directed to a robot having a plurality of leg pairs and capable of functioning in a zero-gravity environment. According to the present teachings, the robot can receive commands from a remotely located host computer and can direct commands to the plurality of leg pairs to achieve movement of the robot.

Referring to FIG. 1, an embodiment of the robot 100 of the present teachings is shown. The robot 100 can include a body 20 having a longitudinal axis 30 and three leg pairs attached to the body 20. Each of the leg pairs can be arranged to articulate or pivot in a corresponding leg pair plane, such as in leg pair planes 40, 80, 110. Each of the leg pair planes 40, 80, 110 can be substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis 30 of the body 20.

Referring to FIG. 2, a first leg pair 42 of the robot 100 of the present teachings is shown. The first leg pair 42 includes first

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legs **42a**, **42b**. One end of each of the first legs **42a**, **42b** can be attached to a portion of the body **20**. Furthermore, each of the first legs **42a**, **42b** can be arranged to articulate or pivot in a clockwise or a counter-clockwise direction with respect to the longitudinal axis **30** of the body **20** within the first leg pair plane **40**.

Referring to FIG. 3, the robot **100** of the present teachings is shown having two leg pairs **42**, **82**. The additional second leg pair **82** includes second legs **82a**, **82b**. One end of each of the second legs **82a**, **82b** can be attached to a portion of body **20**. Furthermore, each of the second legs **82a**, **82b** can be arranged to articulate or pivot in a clockwise or a counter-clockwise direction with respect to the longitudinal axis **30** of the body **20** in the second leg pair plane **80**. The second leg pair plane **80** can be substantially parallel to the first leg pair plane **40**.

Referring to FIG. 4, the robot **100** of the present teachings is shown having three leg pairs **42**, **82**, **112**. The additional third leg pair **112** includes third legs **112a**, **112b**. Each of the legs **112a**, **112b** can be attached to the body **20**. Furthermore, each of the third legs **112a**, **112b** can be arranged to articulate or pivot in a clockwise or a counter-clockwise direction with respect to the longitudinal axis **30** of the body **20** in the third leg pair plane **110**. Moreover, the third leg pair plane **110** can be substantially parallel to the first and second leg pair planes **40**, **80**. According to various embodiments, one or more of the leg pairs **42**, **82**, **112** can be arranged to not be completely perpendicular to the longitudinal axis **30** of the body **20**. For example, the arrangement of the first leg pair **42** and the second leg pair **112** can slightly deviate from being perpendicular with respect to the longitudinal axis **30** to provide an inherently self-centering tendency to the robot **100** as it moves.

During operation, coordinated movement of the three leg pairs **42**, **82**, and **112** in the first, second, and third leg pair planes **40**, **80**, and **110**, respectively, results in the robot **100** moving in a direction perpendicular to the longitudinal axis **30** of the body **20**. That is, the robot **100** can move in a direction transverse to the longitudinal axis of its body **20**, much like the walking characteristics of a crab, which moves in a sideways manner.

Although the robot **100** of the present teachings is described as having three leg pairs **42**, **82**, and **112**, the robot **100** can be arranged to incorporate any number of legs and leg pairs. For example, the robot **100** can have as few as one leg to as many as five or more leg pairs. According to various embodiments, one or more of the leg pairs can be arranged to articulate or pivot beyond the confines of the planes that are substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis **30** of the body **20** of the robot **100**.

Referring to FIG. 5, one exemplary leg of the robot **100** is shown. For illustrative purposes, the leg shown in FIG. 5 corresponds to leg **42a** of the first leg pair **42** but could describe the structure of any of the legs of the robot **100**. The leg **42a** can include a shoulder **44** that can be connectable to the body **20**. The leg **42a** can also include a bicep **46**. A first pivot joint **50** can pivotally connect the shoulder **44** to the bicep **46**. Furthermore, the leg **42a** can include a forearm **48**. A second pivot joint **60** can pivotally connect the forearm **48** to the bicep **46**.

In addition, the leg **42a** can include a foot assembly **52**, such as a gripper assembly as shown in FIG. 5. Preferably, the gripper assembly **52** can include a first gripper **54** and a second gripper **58**. Either or both of the first gripper **54** and the second gripper **58** can include gripper teeth **56**. A first gripper pivot joint **70** can pivotally connect the first gripper **54** to the forearm **48**. Furthermore, a second gripper pivot joint **90** can

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pivotally connect the second gripper **58** to the underside of the forearm **48**. Together, the first gripper pivot joint **70** and the second gripper pivot joint **90** allow the grippers **54**, **58** to open and close to allow the gripper assembly **52** to grip and hold various different objects. The grippers **54**, **58** can be provided in different shapes depending upon the desired types of gripping and/or motions to be performed by the robot **100**.

The pivot joints **50**, **60**, **70**, **90** of the leg **42a** can provide it with at least three degrees of freedom: (i) the first pivot joint **50** can allow the leg **42a** to rotate above or below the body **20** in the first leg pair plane **40**, (ii) the second pivot joint **60** can allow the leg **42a** to achieve a curl motion in the first leg pair plane **40**, and (iii) the gripper joints **70**, **90** can allow the grippers **54**, **58** of the gripper assembly **52** to open or close. According to various embodiments, the leg **42a** can be provided with additional pivot joints, for example, a pivot joint can be provided above the first pivot joint **50**, on or in the vicinity of the shoulder **44**, to allow the leg **42a** to rotate and articulate beyond the first leg pair plane **40**. In such an alternative embodiment, the additional pivot joint would allow one or more of the legs to turn the robot **100** in order to re-direct the movement direction.

The robot **100** can also be designed so that one or more of the legs is modular. For example, the shoulder **44** of a leg **42a** can be provided with a body mount bracket **62** that would allow the leg **42a** to detachably connect with one or more connectors **24** arranged on the body **20**, see FIGS. 6 and 9. Each of the body mount bracket **62** and the corresponding connectors **24** can include complimentary-arranged electrical connectors that provide electrical communication between the leg **42a** and the body **20**. The modular architecture of the legs can simplify debugging and reduce part complexity of the robot **100**.

The housings of the robot body **20** and each of the legs securely support and house various electrical and mechanical components of the robot **100**. Preferably, the body **20** and each of the legs can be fabricated using a process that minimizes the mass of the robot **100** and provides these housings with sufficient strength and durability to withstand extreme conditions, such as weightlessness, vibrations, heat, cold, and the like. For example, the total mass of the robot **100** can be designed to be less than about 5 lbs., and preferably can be about 1.5 lbs. Additionally, the overall dimensions of the robot **100** can be about 36 cm× about 50 cm× about 32 cm or less. Preferably, the robot **100** includes three leg pairs **42**, **82**, **112**, has overall dimensions of about 18 cm× about 25 cm× about 16 cm, and a mass of about 1.5 lbs.

To fabricate the robot **100** with the preferred overall dimensions of about 18 cm× about 25 cm× about 16 cm and a mass of about 1.5 lbs., a solid freeform fabrication process can be implemented. The solid freeform fabrication process can include a selective laser sintering (SLS) process and/or a stereolithography (SLA) process. The chassis of the robot **100**, that is, the housings for the body **20** and each of the legs, can be fabricated using both of the SLS process and the SLA process. The SLS process can be used to produce all parts of the robot **100** with the exception of the gripper assembly **52**, as this process results in much lighter and durable parts as compared to the SLA process. However, the SLA process results in the formation of more precise parts. Accordingly, the gripper assembly **52**, including an integrated gearing mechanism, can preferably be fabricated by the SLA process to achieve a smooth interconnectivity between parts, such as between the gears, while achieving relatively low brittleness.

Referring to FIG. 7, various components that are held within the housings of an exemplary leg **42a** of the robot **100** are shown. According to FIG. 7, the first pivot joint **50** can

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include a first servo motor **64** and the second pivot joint **60** can include a second servo motor **74**. Each of the first servo motor **64** and the second servo motor **74** can include a servo controller module, or SCM. Each SCM can include a motor controller (e.g., an H-Bridge DC motor controller) and a processor (e.g., an ATMEL MEGA88 processor commercially available from Atmel Corporation of San Jose, Calif.) for controlling a servo motor. Furthermore, each SCM can be separately programmed with a unique address so that commands can be addressed and sent specifically to that SCM from a control unit **116** of the robot **100**. The SCM of the second servo motor **74** of the second pivot joint **60** can also be arranged to control the gripper assembly **52**. Although not shown in the figures, a non-modified servo motor (e.g., a non-modified CIRRUS micro-servo commercially available from Global Hobby Distributors of Fountain Valley, Calif.) can be positioned in the first gripper pivot joint **62**. The non-modified servo motor can be arranged to power the gripper assembly **52** and can be controlled by the SCM of the second servo motor **74**.

In addition to servo motors **64**, **74**, each of the first pivot joint **50**, the second pivot joint **60**, and the first gripper pivot joint **70** can include a spring compliance mechanism **72**, **76**, and **78**, respectively. The spring compliance mechanisms **72**, **76**, and **78** can allow each pivoting component (i.e. bicep **46**, forearm **48**, first gripper **54**) of the leg **42a** to deflect past desired positions in either pivoting direction without the respective servo motor being turned. As will be further discussed below, the spring compliance mechanisms **72**, **76**, **78** can function to provide a level of fault tolerance, protect each of the servo motors, and allow the operator to determine torques that have been applied to the components of the leg **42a**.

Referring to FIG. **8**, subcomponents of the first pivot joint **50**, which pivotally connects a shoulder **44** to a bicep **46**, will be described. While FIG. **8** shows the subcomponents of the first pivot joint **50** and portions of the second pivot joint **60**, the same or substantially similar sub-components can be arranged in the second pivot joint **60** which connects the bicep **46** to the forearm **40** (not shown in FIG. **8**), or in any other of the leg pivot joints. The first pivot joint **50** can include a spring mount socket **84** positioned within a first side portion of the shoulder **44** and a potentiometer mount socket **98** positioned inside a second side portion of the shoulder **44**. Additionally, the shoulder **44** can house additional sub-components of the first pivot joint **50** including a spring **86**, rocker arm **88**, front bearing **92**, the servo motor **64** (situated within the housing of the bicep **46**), potentiometer arm **96**, and a rear bearing **94**.

In an assembled state of the shoulder **44**, the spring **86** can sit securely about the spring mount socket **84**. Preferably, the spring mount socket **84** can include a groove that can accommodate the spring **86** and non-rotatably secure it in place, as will be described in more detail below with reference to FIG. **9**. Similarly, and still referring to FIG. **8**, the second pivot joint **60** formed on the bicep **46** can also include a spring mount socket **84** having a groove securing another spring.

Now referring to FIG. **9**, an enlarged view of the structure for securing a spring of a pivot joint to its corresponding spring mount socket **84** is shown. In particular, FIG. **9** shows a closed end of a second spring **104** fitted into a groove **106** of the spring mount socket **84** of the second pivot joint **60** of the bicep **46**. At the open end of the second spring **104**, the two spring ends extend outwardly and away from the spring mount socket **84**. Each of these spring ends can resiliently engage a groove formed in the rocker arm **88** in an assembled condition of the pivot joint, as will be discussed in more detail below.

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Referring now to FIG. **10**, the rocker arm **88** of the first pivot joint **50** is shown in an exploded view of the pivot joint **50**. The rocker arm **88** is shown separated by a distance from an output shaft of the servo motor **64** which is housed within the bicep **46**. The rocker arm **88** can essentially form a radially extending paddle having grooves into which the ends of the spring **86** can extend while a closed end of the spring **86** is arranged about the spring mount socket **84** in the assembled condition of the first pivot joint **50**. In an assembled state of the shoulder **44**, the front bearing **92** of the first pivot joint **50** can sit within the spring mount socket **84** of the shoulder **44**, as described above in relation to FIGS. **8** and **9**. The front bearing **92** can support the rocker arm **88** and any loads applied to the leg. Whenever a torque is applied to a particular leg or a portion thereof, the rocker arm **88** is rotated which in turn pushes against one of the ends of the spring **86** resulting in a counteracting torque being exerted by the spring **86** against the rocker arm **88** in the opposite direction.

Torques that are applied to a particular leg section can be measured by the potentiometer arm **96**, shown in FIG. **8**, and/or by one or more internal potentiometers (not shown) that can be incorporated into one or more of the servo motors **64**, **74**. Moreover, the internal potentiometer can provide information to a control unit **116** of the robot **100** corresponding to conditions of the servo motors **64**, **74** and the position of the rocker arm **88**.

Referring to both FIGS. **11** and **12**, which show additional exploded views of the first pivot joint **50** that connects the shoulder **44** to the bicep **46**, the potentiometer arm **96** can be arranged to fit into a keyed slot **102** on the potentiometer mount socket **98** formed on the shoulder **44**. The potentiometer arm **96** can provide information to the control unit **116** corresponding to the actual positions of the leg. This information can be provided by the potentiometer arm **96** even when the joints of the legs are deflected beyond their desired positions as allowed by the spring-loaded compliance mechanisms **72**, **76**, **78**. By measuring a difference or change between the internal potentiometer of a servo motor and the potentiometer arm **96**, the operator can be provided with information about the torque applied to each of the legs. This information can be analyzed and used by the operator to program further robot movements.

Referring to FIG. **13**, a robot **100** is shown with internal components housed within its body **20** exposed. One or more body covers **128** can be provided to shield the internal components while allowing access thereto. The body **20** can house various components including a control unit **116**, a power source **120**, and a communication system **130**. The power source **120** can be positioned within a power source compartment **124** of the body **20**.

The power source **120** of the robot **100** can be any power source that is capable of providing sufficient power so that the robot **100** can continuously function for at least about 30 minutes. For example, the power source **120** can be a lithium ion cell. The lithium ion cell can be rated for approximately 2000 mAH at a supply voltage of 3.7 V. Other types of cells having different ratings and voltage supplies can be implemented as would be appreciated by one or ordinary skill in the art.

The control unit **116** arranged in the body **20** can be powered by the power source **120**. The control unit **116** can send commands to each of the SCMs located in the first pivot joints **50** and in the second pivot joints **60** of each of the legs. These commands can be communicated to the SCMs of the legs by a hard wired interface **180** (see FIG. **15**) that can link the control unit **116** with each of the SCMs. An exemplary wire interface **180** is ATMEL's two-wire interface (TWI) (com-

mercially available from Atmel Corporation of San Jose, Calif.). Additionally, the control unit **116** can include a Universal Synchronous/Asynchronous Receiver/Transmitter (UART) interface that is capable of accommodating the communication system **130**. The communication system **130** allows the control unit **116** to receive commands from a remotely located host computer **190** and to send data, such as, for example, status reports to the host computer **190**. Any communication system **130** that would enable the control unit **116** to receive and send information from a remote host computer can be implemented in the robot **100** of the present teachings, such as, for example, a radio modem or BLUETOOTH communication device. Such a BLUETOOTH communication device can be arranged to communicate at band rates as high as about 115200 bps.

Referring to FIG. **14**, a schematic of the control system of the robot **100** of the present teachings is shown. The control unit **116** can include a main processor **140**, such as, for example, the ATMEL MEGA88 processor (commercially available from Atmel Corporation of San Jose, Calif.). Sensor processing, motor control, command response, telemetry storage/transmittal, as well as other functions, can be processed by way of the main processor **140** of the robot **100**. A command/data acquisition station, such as, for example, a host computer **190** located at a remote location, allows the operator to send commands and receive and display robot telemetry data obtained from the robot **100** via a wireless link. The host computer **190** can be provided with sufficient memory to store telemetry data, as well as other data for use at a later time.

The control unit **116** of the robot **100** can be programmed with a first code and each of the SCMs (e.g., the first SCM **150** of the first pivot joint **50** and the second SCM **160** of the second pivot joint **60**) can be programmed with a second code. The first code can enable the control unit **116** to at least (i) send gait positions to each of the SCMs **150**, **160**, (ii) send gripper actuator commands to SCM **160**, (iii) receive commands from the host computer **190** to actuate robot movement, and (iv) send robot status information to the host computer **190**. The first SCM **150** of the first pivot joint **50** includes a first processor **152**. The second SCM **160** of the second pivot joint **60** includes a second processor **162**. The second SCM **160** can also be arranged to send control signals to a gripper servo **170** for controlling the gripper assembly **52**. Each of the SCMs **150**, **160** can implement proportional-integral-derivative (PID) control of the servo motors **64**, **74**. Implementation of PID control enables under-damped and relatively fast servo motor response during actuation. Furthermore, as discussed above, the internal potentiometers **156**, **166** of the servo motors **64**, **74** can provide the servo motors of the leg with status information that can be transmitted to the host computer **190**. Additionally, each of the potentiometer arms **96** of the first pivot joints **50**, **60** (shown in FIGS. **8** and **12**) can provide information to the host computer **190** corresponding to the actual position of each of the legs. Moreover, by measuring the difference or changes between the internal potentiometers **156**, **166** and the potentiometer arms **96** information corresponding to the torque applied to each of the legs can be determined.

Control of a sample requested leg movement will now be described with reference to both FIGS. **14** and **15**. During such sample operation, the remotely located host computer **190** can send a first command to the robot **100** directing it to pivot the bicep **46** of the leg in a counter-clockwise direction around the first pivot joint **50**. Concurrently, the host computer **190** can send a second command to the robot **100** directing it pivot the forearm **48** of the leg in a clockwise

direction around the second pivot joint **60**, and a third command to directing it to open the gripper assembly **52**. Each of these commands can be received by the communication system **130** located within the body **20** of the robot **100**. The communication system **130** then forwards these commands to the control unit **116** via an UART interface **132**.

The main processor **140** of the control unit **116** then distinguishes each of these three commands. The first command is then forwarded to the first SCM **150** of the first pivot joint **50** by way of a wire interface **180**, while the second and third commands are forwarded to the second SCM **160** of the second pivot joint **60** by a further wire interface **180**.

The first SCM **150** processes the first command with the first processor **152**. The first processor **152** then sends the first command to a first motor controller **154**, which activates the first servo motor **64** thereby pivoting the bicep **46** in a counter-clockwise direction at a commanded speed and distance.

The second SCM **160** processes the second command with the second processor **162** and also determines whether the second command is providing instructions either to the second servo motor **74** of the forearm **48** or to the micro servo **170** of the gripper assembly **52**. Since the command is directed to the second servo motor **74** of the forearm **48**, the second processor **162** sends the second command to a second motor controller **164** to activate the second servo motor **74** to move the forearm **48** in a clockwise direction at a commanded speed and distance.

The second SCM **160** also processes the third command with the second processor **162** and again determines whether the third command is providing instructions to the second servo motor **74** of the forearm **48** or to the micro servo **170** of the gripper assembly **52**. Since the command is directed to the micro servo **170** of the gripper assembly **52**, the second processor **162** then sends the third command to the micro servo **170** to open the gripper assembly **52**.

Additional commands can be sent to the robot **100** and processed in a like manner to achieve coordinated movement of the legs and, in turn, efficient movement of the robot **100**.

Referring to FIG. **15**, the robot **100** of the present teachings is shown in the process of employing a statically stable tripod gait. Characteristics of the tripod gait include a three-point contact with a surface at all times. To develop such a gait for use by the robot **100** of the present teachings, each of the pertinent positions along a path is recorded and entered into a gait table. An algorithm running on the main processor **140** of the robot **100** can parse the gait table and depending on the displacement of a particular joint, performs various interpolations (for larger position displacements, more interpolations can be calculated). After the position interpolations are calculated, they are stored into a new gait table that can be used to command robot motion using the host computer **190**, as discussed above.

Referring to FIG. **16**, a testing arrangement for the robot **100** of the present teachings is shown. The testing arrangement encompassed a space analogue (i.e. zero-gravity) environment produced by a reduced gravity aircraft flight. The results of the test flight showed that the robot **100** of the present teachings can successfully traverse a wire mesh **200** in zero-gravity conditions. During the test, two high-resolution video cameras (not shown) filmed several attempts of the robot **100** to traverse the wire mesh **200** during the zero-gravity condition. The rate of traversal of the robot **100** was recorded as one body length (equivalent to three steps) per 18 seconds. In the testing environment, the robot **100** was exposed to 20 seconds of weightlessness. During this time, an inertial measurement unit (IMU) **210** passively monitored the conditions on the wire mesh **200** and sent data to the host

computer **190**, which in this example was a laptop computer **190**, for storage. The flight conditions did not cause any recordable external disturbances in the testing environment, including the wire mesh **200**.

During a test flight, two robots **100** each having identical mechanical characteristics was run using different gait algorithms. The control unit **116** of the robot **100** included an interface connected to a processor that recorded data from the IMUs **210**. Due to time constraints, three external switches were mounted on the outside area of the chassis of the robots **100** and were interfaced to the main controller **140** of the robot **100**. These three switches operated to direct the robot **100** with commands to achieve movement during the test.

The test environment was subjected to the external effects of the plane. The plane, a modified Boeing 747, flew in a parabolic flight path to simulate zero-gravity (0 G) conditions. During each parabolic flight path, 20 seconds of 0 G conditions were followed by 30 seconds of 1.8 G conditions. During the 1.8 G conditions, the robot **100** was positioned on the mesh **200** and was enabled/turned on. It was recorded that the robot **100** sustained walking capabilities during the transition from 0 G to 1.8 G. The robot was also able to sustain walking capabilities during the 1.8 G period.

On the ground, much time was dedicated to constructing a gait table that would allow the robot **100** to crawl on the mesh **200** during zero-gravity conditions. This required a meticulous study of how the robot **100** would react while in flight. A gait table was refined to handle a gait that would allow the robot **100** to grip a rung with one leg and extend to another rung with a different leg from various positions on the mesh **200**. External perturbations of the mesh **200**, including low and high-frequency vibrations of both small and large magnitudes, were also applied to the robot **100** to test the functionality of the gait. Smoothing algorithms allowed an interpolation between the key positions of the gait to be entered into the table. This resulted in a smooth leg motion that would otherwise be unobtainable with the PID controllers. The robot **100** was programmed with gaits that allowed it to traverse the mesh **200** in all orientations (i.e. vertically, upside down, and right side up). The span of each gripper assembly when opened allowed for rough placement of the leg over a rung of the mesh **200**. The gripper assembly was arranged such that it could actuate and successfully catch a rung while being off by as much as about 0.39 in (1 cm) in any direction.

Those skilled in the art can appreciate from the foregoing description that the present teachings can be implemented in a variety of forms. Therefore, while these teachings have been described in connection with particular embodiments and examples thereof, the true scope of the present teachings should not be so limited. Various changes and modifications may be made without departing from the scope of the teachings herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A robot comprising:

a body having a longitudinal axis and including a control unit and a power source; and

a first leg pair including a first leg and a second leg, each leg of the first leg pair being pivotally attached to the body and constrained to pivot in a first leg pair plane that is substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the body.

2. The robot of claim 1, further comprising a second leg pair including a first leg and a second leg, each leg of the second leg pair being pivotally attached to the body and constrained to pivot in a second leg pair plane that is substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the body and substantially parallel to the first leg pair plane.

3. The robot of claim 2, further comprising a third leg pair including a first leg and a second leg, each leg of the third leg pair being pivotally attached to the body and constrained to pivot in a third leg pair plane that is substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the body and substantially parallel to the first and second leg pair planes.

4. The robot of claim 3, wherein at least three of the legs of the robot are arranged to contact a surface at all times during operation of the robot.

5. The robot of claim 1, wherein at least one of the legs is a modular interchangeable leg.

6. The robot of claim 1, wherein each of the legs includes at least one controller module arranged to communicate with the control unit of the body.

7. A robot comprising:

a body including a power source and a control unit; and at least one leg pivotally attached to the body and including a first pivot joint, the first pivot joint including a first servo motor, a first controller module, and a first spring-loaded compliance mechanism;

wherein the control unit is arranged to communicate with the first controller module to control a first pivotal movement of the leg.

8. The robot of claim 7, wherein the at least one leg includes a second pivot joint including a second servo motor, a second controller module, and a second spring-loaded compliance mechanism, the control unit being arranged to communicate with the second controller module to control a second pivotal movement of the leg.

9. The robot of claim 8, wherein the at least one leg further includes a gripper assembly.

10. The robot of claim 9, wherein the gripper assembly includes a gripper pivot joint including a third spring-loaded compliance mechanism.

11. The robot of claim 7, wherein the body further includes a communication system including (i) a wireless area network capable of receiving high-level commands from a host computer, and (ii) a wire interface arranged to send commands from the control unit to at least one controller module in a leg.

12. The robot of claim 9, wherein the control unit is programmable to perform at least one of the following: (i) transmit a plurality of gait positions to each of the first controller module and the second controller module, (ii) transmit gripper actuator commands to the gripper assembly, (iii) receive commands from a host computer located a distance away from the robot, and (iv) transmit status information to the host computer.

13. The robot of claim 7, wherein the first controller module includes a motor controller and a processor.

14. The robot of claim 7, wherein the first pivot joint includes at least one potentiometer capable of taking measurement relating to a net torque exerted by the spring compliance mechanism.

15. A robot system comprising:

a body comprising:

a communication system capable of receiving high level commands from a host computer;

a control unit; and

a power source;

at least one leg pivotally attached to the body, each leg comprising:

a first pivot joint including a first controller module, a first servo motor, and a first spring-loaded compliance mechanism;

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a second pivot joint including a second controller module, a second servo motor, and a second spring-loaded compliance mechanism; and

a foot assembly;

wherein each of the first controller module and the second controller module is capable of directly communicating with the control unit.

16. The robot system of claim **15**, wherein the second controller module is capable of transmitting control signals to the foot assembly.

17. The robot system of claim **15**, wherein the foot assembly includes a micro-servo.

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18. The robot system of claim **15**, wherein the communication system comprises a wireless area network.

19. The robot system of claim **15**, wherein the first controller module and the second controller module are in communication with the control unit by way of a wire interface.

20. The robot system of claim **15**, wherein the control unit is programmable to perform at least one of the following: (i) transmit a plurality of gait positions to each of the first controller module and the second controller module, (ii) transmit commands to foot assembly, (iii) receive commands from a host computer located a distance away from the robot, and (iv) transmit status information to the host computer.

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